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OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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LEHIGH UNIVERSITY — BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

November, 1946

Union Now?

The following comment by a director on Professor Cardwell's proposal was received too late for publication in the October issue of the News Letter.

"The consensus of those I have talked with appears to be about this: 1. talk all we wish privately about this matter of unionization, but keep it in the inner sanctum of own private CEA meetings; 2. no publicity concerning such thinking; 3. the ranks of the intellectuals of America should be the last ever to talk of unionization no matter how starved and underpaid they may be; 4. It is no good. Let us talk about our professional problems, but keep the social and political angles out of it.

"I, for one, feel this way: I approve of labor organizing. It is later than we think so far as the capital-labor problem is concerned. I do not approve of the way labor has handled its problems since the end of the war. So far as our secondary schools are concerned, something is needed there and perhaps unionization is the answer. But, so far as our American Universities are concerned, I am opposed to unionization. The day the university I am in or of which I am a part unionizes, that is the day I resign. Perhaps it is the hang-over of 'rugged individualism' and of 'free enterprise,' but I personally want no part of it. Conditions in our universities are better now than they once were, and it is possible they will improve with continued high registrations and the passage of time. I am of the opinion that we need less talk of unionization within our ranks and more talk of the 'PRO' aspects of our professional work."

APPOINTMENT BUREAU

The College English Association expects to have a desk in the registration line at the Statler Hotel December 27, 28, 29 and 30. It will also maintain quarters where members may register with the appointment Bureau, and may confer with administrative officers who wish to see them. The mechanics of the Bureau's Operation

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Annual Meeting

As announced in the October issue of the News Letter, the Annual Meeting of CEA will be held at the Burlington Hotel, Washington, D. C., Sunday, December 29, at 6:00 P. M. The Burlington Hotel is two and a half blocks from the Statler, at 1120 Vermont Avenue, N. W., just off Thomas Circle.

After dinner, the evening will be devoted to a discussion of "Training Desirable for Teachers of College English". A panel of three will introduce the topic and lead the discussion: Professor Fred B. Millett, Wesleyan, Professor Theodore Spencer, Harvard, and Professor Austin Warren, State University of Iowa. All teachers of English will be welcome at this meeting.

The cost of the dinner will be the lowest possible for a substantial meal. Reservations for places at the dinner should reach the Executive Secretary at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Penna., not later than December 21.

New York Section Meets

The New York Section of CEA will meet at Columbia University, Saturday, December 14, at 9:30 A. M. Following the morning program, there will be a luncheon and symposium at the Faculty Club; cost, \$1.50 per person. Reservations for the luncheon should be sent to Professor Donald Clark, Columbia University.

The topic for the meeting will be "Literature for the non-major: what can we do to increase the understanding and enjoyment of literature by the general college student?" The speakers:

Strang Lawson, Colgate, "The Hungry Sheep Look Up And Are Not Fed"

John Farrar, publisher, "Read 'Em And Weep; A Publisher Looks At College Literature Classes"

Helen Hull, Columbia, "Speaking As A Novelist, I Would Say . . ."

Professor Ellis Resigns

A vacancy was created on the Board of Directors of the Association by the resignation on October 9 of Professor Milton Ellis, Uni-

Shakespeare Adapted

Would I like to have for use in my classes texts of several Shakespearean plays edited and revised according to modern principles of dramatic structure? That inquiry landed on my desk some months ago. Very much to my astonishment. I did not need much time in which to decide on the vigorous NO that I wrote in the space appointed.

The writer of the inquiry made much of an argument to the effect that these plays, as they appear in currently received texts, are burdened with superfluous, non-dramatic matter that is not only anathema to the competent dramatic technician but useless and confusing to the student. Therefore, without any question, the college student should not be required to spend his precious time on the 'complete' plays. Instead, he should be made acquainted with the dramas as Shakespeare would have written them if he had possessed competent technical skill or had availed himself of really modern help. The proponent assured his prospects that he possessed the competence to turn out such technically excellent versions of the plays as ought to be used in college classes in Shakespeare. Moreover, he bolstered his proposal with a list of shrewdly selected and edited quotations from divers commentators. The drift of these sentences might well raise in unwary minds a troubling suspicion that Shakespeare did unhappily write into his plays much more than neat, clean-cut dramatic movement requires. And then would arise the alluring prospect of banishing difficult problems of interpretation. What a boon for these days!

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versity of Maine. In his letter of resignation, Professor Ellis wrote, "I resigned as head of my department in June after twenty-seven years' service, and since August I have been recuperating slowly from an operation. I am now on leave of absence for the fall semester and out of touch with college matters. For these reasons I feel I must resign from the Board of Directors."

Let's Be Fair to The High Schools

In the excellent report on "The College English Curriculum" (THE NEWS LETTER, March, 1946) there are several controversial proposals, one of which concerns the problem of students seriously deficient in writing ability. The Committee's belief is that "the time has come to turn the problem back to the high school."

Theoretically, it is a wise proposal, but, I believe, a wholly impracticable one. Its consideration involves the answers to three questions: 1) Why make this proposal at this time, 2) What can the high schools do with the problem? 3) What shall we (college teachers) do if the high schools cannot solve the problem?

1) The proposal for letting the high schools deal with the problem of the inadequately prepared student is offered now, the Committee states, because "the college years have proved too late for a solution," and because "the college has found no way of satisfactorily coping with this problem."

But the learning process, surely, has not ceased in eighteen-year and nineteen-year-old youth, and if such poorly prepared students have the intelligence and/or the desire to overcome bad language habits of many years' development, they can acquire sufficient knowledge in the sub-freshman and normal composition courses to fulfill all college requirements.

A certain percentage of such students do thus succeed; but the majority do not. The plain truth (seen time and again in orientation tests in the parallel of English and psychological scores) is that they do not have the intelligence; nor have they any faith in incentives to establish fairly permanent habits of correct expression. All preachments about the value of good English both by ourselves and even by leaders in the fields they should like to enter, fall on deaf ears.

The Committee, therefore, is right in saying that we in college have not solved the problem of the student seriously deficient in writing ability. But if does not seem

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THE NEWS LETTER

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Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, \$2.00 a year. Subscription for Libraries, \$1.50.

The Requirement

Like the problem of evil, the problem of freshman composition invites no happy solution. In the main, students are given a shotgun prescription heavily cathartic and only mildly therapeutic. Nor can the treatment be otherwise when all students are required to take English I. The large and incredibly varied catch seined into English classes by The Requirement can be processed only in a routine way.

But wholly aside from the pedagogical schizophrenia which is an indirect result of it, The Requirement is the direct cause of two serious weaknesses. First, because they support The Requirement, other departments absolve themselves of responsibility for making their students write well. And if their students do not write well, they blame the English department. But the English department, which has labored heroically, replies that until every course a student takes is a course in composition, the elementary instruction of the first year will seem necessarily to be only an isolated discipline. Were The Requirement abolished and the English department expected only to provide basic instruction for those students who need it, the spread of responsibility for student literacy would be healthy in all colleges which genuinely desire to make their graduates write as well as they can.

The second weakness is even more serious. English teaching is

rapidly becoming less attractive. To teach the numerous sections created by The Requirement, English departments recruit a large corps of young instructors whose prospects of advancement are remote at best. There are simply not enough higher positions to be filled, and it is impossible for these young people to make a career teaching freshmen. Even in comparison with other University novitiates, the English instructor's apprenticeship seems heavily-burdened, tediously extended, and poorly paid. Moreover, with so large a supply of young freshmen teachers to choose from in making appointments to higher ranking positions, administrators find it easy to maintain consistently lower salary scales in English departments than in many others.

English departments might lose some students were The Requirement to be abolished or modified, but they might also consider the resulting gains to themselves, to their students, and to their program for superior literacy among college graduates.

From the Mail . . .

Dear Professor Fitzhugh:

You have kept the *News Letter* a lively sheet, and it seems to me to have continuing usefulness. I'd like to see it small and breezy and for quick reading time. Certainly we don't want it to be another documented research periodical, nor do we want it in the more languid stream of appreciation. This is a day when we need some publication to keep us in quick touch with the thoughts and practices of teachers and Departments of English over the country. We have a community of background and interest, and we don't need lengthy exposition to make us aware of the developments.

The *News Letter* is one publication which I consistently read, and as long as it stays in its present groove I expect to read it. It could develop somewhat in size and perhaps carry some of its articles to greater length, but I am fearful to have very much happen to it in the way of paralleling *The Saturday Review of Literature* or *The Bulletin of the A. A. U. P.* or the *American Scholar*. These periodicals are too much by way of competition. In our present field we stand alone.

I don't like the title CRITIC. It sounds like Addison or Steele, and this is a streamlined age. We are not spectators, but in the thick of

the movements of our day. I prefer the *News Letter* to any of the titles that have been proposed. We are always interested in "news," and "a news letter", whether it's by the Fuggers or a group of present day professors, is likely to be informative and spritely. That should continue to be our emphasis, and the title ought to emphasize that point of view.

T. M. PEARCE

Head, Department of English
University of New Mexico

There is no change contemplated in the content or tone of our publication. But a change of title is necessary if we are to benefit from the cheapest postal rates.

Incidentally, I like the notion of the change from NEWS LETTER to CRITIC very much.

Charles A. Dawson

Roanoke College

The Penalty of Promotion

A grim paradox of college teaching is that success often brings promotion to an administrative post in which serious teaching or research is impossible. It is well that the chairman or head who determines policy should be a wise and experienced man. But too often he is overwhelmed with committee work, petty chores, and routine correspondence. The writer of the following letter has agreed to its publication with the hope that it might provoke fruitful discussion of this problem in academic administration.

"Professor Robert T. Fitzhugh,
Executive Secretary
The College English Association
Lehigh University
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
Dear Professor Fitzhugh:

I have decided to register in the Appointment Bureau of the Association.

As you know, I am the head of my department here. The department has grown so large that routine administrative work has taken me almost completely out of the classroom. I am making an excellent salary, and so far as I know I can stay here for the rest of my life. But the chances are that I shall never really have an opportunity to teach again. I believe that I must strike out now for what I want to do; otherwise, it will soon be too late. In short, I want a teaching job, and I am willing to accept a lower rank and salary in order to get what I want. At the same time, I am not begging.

As long as I am head of the department here I shall also be interested in employing people listed by the Bureau. I trust that my somewhat anomalous position will not be too confusing.

Sincerely yours,"

The editor has received a carbon copy of the following letter, with sixteen signatures, presumably those of the Staff of the Communications Center at Hampton Institute. The letter is published for the information of the members.

(Continued on page 3, column 2)

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Lehigh University

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"College Indifference" — Comment

A professor of Engineering sympathetic to English departments wrote the following comment on Professor Rusterholtz's article in the September NEWS LETTER.

Thank you for sending me a copy of the *News Letter*. I have read the item, "College Indifference," to which you call attention. In trying to explain the failure that Professor Rusterholtz reports, I am led to wonder whether he had not chosen three errors which the students considered inconsequential, and therefore he found so little improvement.

If you convince a student that the purpose of an English course is to teach him to convey an idea clearly and with all the finer shades of meaning preserved, I think every one of them will see the utilitarian value of the course and will strive hard to develop this skill. I think Mr. Rusterholtz chose bad examples.

Professor Rusterholtz's reply follows:

I agree that one of the three errors which I cited is inconsequential and hence may not impress students. My opinion is that correct use of both the apostrophe and also of quotation marks or italics for titles of books, periodicals, and articles is important, but that the use of a comma after the name of a state when it follows the name of a city is not vital.

I purposely selected this relatively minor error in order to see whether students would make as many small mistakes as serious ones. I found that each of the three errors, selected for emphasis because of their previous frequency, appeared about equally often in my test. Hence my conclusion that college students seem to consider errors in general inconsequential.

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My very ready response to this prospectus may have been too curt. It expressed, however, my thought and my feeling, both distilled from experience. I do not want even skillful garbling of texts for use in college English courses in Shakespeare. The business of such courses I conceive to be something quite different from that of classes in dramatic production. In the latter situation, a study of the techniques of fitting a Shakespearean play to varied conditions of a modern stage may be of the first importance. In the former, the primary consideration is the read-

ing of an Elizabethan dramatist who wrote for his contemporary theater. To offer to students engaged in this kind of study a 'cut' version is a highly questionable action.

Further, suppose the Shakespeare material forms part of a program in World Literature or Great Books. In such a course, the college student should read it with all its accompanying Renaissance marks present, if not accounted for. Why anyone, aware of the trends of the day, should propose any other procedure is an interesting subject for speculation.

After all, William Shakespeare was, first and last, a poet. Experience has taught me to put my trust in the poetic approach to his plays. That much of the poetry is not strictly dramatic is commonplace knowledge. Technically correct reconstruction would certainly blot a deal of it. Ben Jonson might have been competent so to re-cast these plays, but he knew better.

Charles Dawson
Roanoke College
Salem, Va.

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are simple. A members pays his fee (\$3.00) and fills out a blank. He is then given a number and his blank is filed for inspection by those who wish to hire teachers. If a dean or chairman expresses interest in a registrant, the registrant's number is posted on a blackboard. When he sees his number, the registrant consults the clerk in charge, arranges for an interview, and if possible reports the results of the interview. The procedure is essentially that of the American Chemical Society's Employment Service which has been highly successful in bringing together chemists who wish positions and college officials who need chemists.

(Continued from page 2, column 4)

October 16, 1946
G. & C. Merriman Co., Publishers
Springfield, Massachusetts
Gentlemen:

We are writing to call your attention to the classification of the word "nigger" as "Colloq." in *The New International Dictionary*, Second Edition, and to inquire if this designation is correct and proper.

In *The New International Dictionary* the word "colloquial" is specifically defined as follows: "... acceptable and appropriate in ordinary conversational context, as in intimate speech among culti-

I've Been Reading

Members are invited to contribute to reviews of books, old or new, which they wish to call to the attention of other English teachers. Professor J. Gordon Eaker is now Head, Department of English, Jersey City Junior College, Jersey City, New Jersey.

ANIMAL FARM—by George Orwell. (Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, 1946).

"This devil is mighty in will and strength, as witches are skilful," says the *Bestiary* in its "signification" of Cethegrande, the Whale. "He makes men hunger and thirst and lust after sins; he draws men to him with his breath—those are the weak in true faith. The big ones he cannot draw to him; by big ones I mean the steadfast in true faith, body and soul." The beast-fable has a distinguished history in English literature, to which Mr. George Orwell has now added another distinguished example.

After the animals rebel and take over The Manor Farm, it is not long before the reader finds himself following avidly the course of the Soviet experiment into World War II and beyond, in a delightful English counter-thrust to "Peter and the Wolf." The student of satire will find much to reflect about in *Animal Farm*, both in his capacity as scholar and as citizen. "The big ones" on both sides, Mr. Orwell fears, have been drawn only too strongly by the breath of Leviathan.

It seems unquestionable that we are now in the full tide of another brilliant age of satire, which we must by all means take account of. The age-old fable, in the hands of artisans such as Thurber and Orwell who "as witches are skilful," offers the teacher of literature a new chance to shed light on the ways of humorists back through Swift and Gay to La Fontaine to Chaucer and all the way back to Father Aesop.

Joseph Jones
The University of Texas

vated people, in familiar letters, in informal speeches or writings, but not in formal written discourse." On the basis of this definition of the word "colloquial" we question the labeling of the word "nigger" as a colloquial expression. We doubt that this word is properly used in informal speech and writing, and we observe that this term is equally as derogatory as the word "kike." Furthermore, we

(Continued on page 4, column 2)

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Grammar Not Purely Reasonable

To twist a popular phrase, the business of English teachers is surely to influence people, and—it might be a fairly good plan to win some friends. Part of the job is persuasion. Being one of the few professors of English, who took no interest in English until after I was a freshman, I think I can avoid one thing students resent.

Our greatest difficulty is that we SEEM to claim too much, and in many cases give the impression of claiming far more than we mean to claim.

A phrase in a very good article in our News Letter happened to hit my eye—"the study of grammar as a rational system." My first reaction was to reject the idea, and I fear that two classes of people will share my reaction, namely almost everyone who takes English merely as a requirement, and everyone who has a very deep interest in grammar. Of course I thought the thing over, and began to see that the phrase is defensible. The ideal end of a grammarian is surely to find out and explain the reason for each and every locution. In that sense grammar is a rational system, and that, surely, is what the writer who said it had in mind. But that is not exactly what the average freshman thinks is meant by such a declaration. He expects that his English teacher is extremely careful in his phrasing. The average student thinks such an attitude means grammar is a matter of pure reason. If he is a person not particularly interested in the subject, but rather keen, he feels there is something wrong. If he is actually a budding linguist, he knows it will not hold water.

Of course there is an immense amount of reason in grammar. But my teacher, Professor Sturtevant, allows me to quote his definition of a grammar, which he tells me is based on a statement of someone else. Grammar is a set of statements about paradigms, rules, and a list of exceptions. Every living language has some of those exceptions, and some of them are not reasonable. The whole nature of an idiom is that it is not purely reasonable when used, although the degree of unreason varies. Some idioms can be figured out the moment a user cares to think about them; some can be figured out by any user of the language with antiquarian tastes; a few may be satisfactorily explained by only

the most advanced students, or still remain conjectural.

How many speakers of that most logical language, French, ever consider why one puts in the last word in the phrase, "Je ne sais pas?" What ancient Greek, from Plato to Lucian, could have known why he used a singular verb with a neuter plural subject. ("Neuter plurals descend from Proto Indo-European collective nouns.")

I cite extreme cases, but if only the Greek student can give an unchallengeable form which was, for every user in 1,000 years, completely unreasonable; anyone can cite examples of idiom in any living language. French has lots of illogical gender. Even English retains a few rare examples of it. Who calls a cat "it?"

For years I have told students, "I advise you to use some locutions for the same reasons that you wear a necktie. I advise you to avoid some locutions for the same reasons that deter you from going to the opera in a riding habit." That is, (to use an idiom which I myself cannot completely explain but that every reader will understand) "coming clean" with students. They will accept a convention cheerfully, when they know it is a convention.

But it is desirable to get rid of the theory that we, as teachers, legislate or dictate the rules. They were "discovered, not devised," as Pope remarks of another set of rules.

English teachers did not make grammar the way they'd like it. They can do nothing about it, save observe the accepted conventions, and advise their students to follow them. Emphasize the fact that English grammar is a highly logical matter. But avoid the untenable position that it is all reasonable. Too many people know it is not.

THOS. O. MABBOTT
Hunter College of the
City of New York

(Continued from page 3, column 3)

know that the word strikes a discordant note, especially among Negroes, who consider the term expressive of derogation. For the foregoing reasons we wish to recommend that the word "nigger" be classified "Derogatory" in the next edition of *The New International Dictionary* just as the word "kike" is labeled in the second edition.

A copy of this letter is being sent to the National Council of Teachers of English, the College

(Continued on page 5, column 1)

THE SHILLS OF CULTURE

"Shills are low fellows," my Uncle Frank used to say; "they can ruin an otherwise good circus." When I was a boy I could never see much sense in this remark of my Uncle's. As we stood in front of the grifters and pitchmen who loudly extolled their bargain wonders, I'd watch the fellows in the crowd rush up and buy tickets; naturally I wanted Frank to do the same for us. But Frank knew they were shills, the men hired to cause a crush at the ticket window. They didn't know anything about circuses; they didn't really care about what went on under the Big Top.

In education we have our share of shills today. They are your brothers on the faculty who cheer loudly for the humanities and talk glibly of cultural expansion without having the faintest idea of what they're talking about. They need to be spotted before they ruin many a program now getting under way.

Fortunately the shills of culture can be easily detected. After they have finished their spiels about the methodology and implementation of integration in letters and the fine arts, you should ask them how they liked Szigeti's concert last Sunday over the radio. The shills, of course, for all their talk, never listen to such things. Or you can ask them whether they agree with Frank Lloyd Wright's views as expressed last month in University Hall. The shills won't know what you're talking about. At the Little Theater you will not be able to ask them how they enjoyed the Roth Quartet, because they won't be there to be questioned. And when the Art Museum opens its new exhibition of sculpture you'll never find the shills there—they will be busy writing up their speeches for the next sectional conference on the humanities.

Not everybody who cries "Se-same" knows what is behind the door. Many of the loudest chanters would be first scared and then bored if they knew what was within. And these fellows give letters and the fine arts a bad name. One of my Eastern colleagues remarked recently, "About the worst testimonial against the liberalizing, cultural advantages of the liberal arts is to be seen at Z University. Having taken a look at the English Department there, that neurotic group, completely

impervious to philosophy, music, and the fine arts, who wouldn't rather major in chemistry and take his chances of picking up culture outside the curriculum?"

Luckily there are many teachers well equipped to handle and promulgate the humanities. I hope they will eventually be a potent influence on our students and faculty. But the noise of the shills outside should not be allowed to interfere with the good work being done under the Big Top. Frank was right: "Shills are low fellows; they can ruin any show."

George S. McCue,
Colorado College.

Correction . . .

The September *News Letter* reported the following registrant with the Bureau:

Woman, Ph.D. Chicago, 20 years experience, Chaucer, Medieval, 19th Century.

The registrant is a man, and has a book in press.

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forward to . . .

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Within precisioned curving steel.

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Pasture and tillage and tippie of mine,

Each from the other, both from the one,

Village and farmstead swiftly divided

By chromium-coated vehicular wheel,

Curving with roadway embankment,

Straight-flashing and rushing away . . .

Swift are the brown sparrow's wings,

Sure and swift to have joy of the air

In powerful alloroned flight.

Swifter is flashing aluminum bird That flies in its prison of fire:

Swifter, exceeding by far
Inherited safety of speed,
Intuitive telling of speed
In the weightless brain of a bird:

Bird stricken in flight,
Now flightless bird.

—August H. Mason
University of Alabama

(Continued from page 4, column 2)

English Association, the National Association of Teachers of Speech, and the Association of Teachers of Language in Negro Colleges.

Respectfully yours,

STAFF OF COMMUNICATIONS
CENTER

(Department of English)
Hampton Institute
Hampton, Virginia

The G. and C. Merriam Company reports that it has eliminated the word "nigger" from school editions, and that it plans to make plate changes in the near future which will revise the classification of the word in the International and Collegiate editions. The NEWS LETTER is happy to report this example of language in the actual process of change.

(Continued from page 1, column 4)

quite ethical, now that we have tried and failed, to go through the "washing-of-hands" process and say to the high schools: "Well, it's your problem; you solve it." And when they ask what, in the light of our experience, we suggest, we reply: "We don't know; it's your responsibility to find the solution."

2) What the high schools can do is, apparently, not much, other than in high school. There the teaching load is four to six classes (each frequently with a different preparation) a day, for a twenty to thirty-hour teaching week; extra-curricular and extra-mural responsibilities are heavy, as well as parental, administrative, and athletic pressures—and where the goal of the less brilliant or the activities-minded student is graduation, not the acquisition of knowledge (we see enough of such examples in college, but they are few in comparison with the high school), the pressures on the teacher for a passing mark are virtually inescapable.

Left to themselves, the high schools might provide the answer of adequate English preparation to a greater extent than they do now. In an article entitled "What Ails Our High Schools?" (*American Mercury*, May, 1946), Benjamin M. Steigman, a New York City high school principal, has several illuminating paragraphs on what might be done in the teaching of English, could the time now demanded by less important subjects be devoted to it.

3) If the high schools cannot solve the problem of the inadequately prepared student, the colleges have four courses of action, two drastic and two humane. First, they can, on the basis of their own entrance examinations, refuse to admit such students. But in any but post-war years, colleges in general are too eager to get students to put any such plan into practice; also many a state and municipal institution is, by its charter, required to admit all properly qualified applicants (i. e., high school graduates).

Second, colleges could urge (until they succeed, if they would submit to the same plan themselves) that all high school students be promoted from year to year and be graduated only on the basis of examinations graded by an impartial central state board. Such a plan, too, is open to so many objections, both valid and invalid, that it will probably never be urged. In any event, both these drastic proposals could only be in-

tiated by college teachers; their adoption is a matter for the college administration.

One humane and practical course of action is that college teachers of English seek opportunities and means of working with the high school teachers toward a solution of this common problem. Too often the graduate study for the A. M. and Ph. D. degrees and the rise in academic rank lead the college teacher farther and farther from cooperation with the high school teacher. The trend should be emphatically reversed.

A second humane and practical course of action is to do as we have been doing: accept these poorly prepared students along with the others, and do, as the Committee suggested is a corollary, the best that we can do for them. In our less intransigent moments we might realize that—despite all the trouble they cause, despite the fact that our work would be more pleasant by their absence, despite the expense, despite the fact that not many of them will survive until college graduation—no great harm has been done to the social and intellectual structure of the country because these students have had their chance at obtaining a college education.

Another unpleasant truth is that some of these students—after all the agony, tumult, trouble, and travail—are going to absorb just enough about correctness in writing to satisfy the requirements for college graduation (when what they have learned will be swiftly forgotten), and yet in after years are perhaps going to reach success (however defined) in life, and be a credit to both their community and their college.

And a final unpleasant truth is that, in spite of all that both high school and college teachers of English can do, some of these students are constitutionally incapable of learning correct habits of composition, just as they—or others—are incapable of learning anything about mathematics or chemistry, or of acquiring certain kinds of manual skill. John Dryden once told some such bitter truth about writing poetry to Jonathan Swift. We may as well recognize the language limitations of such students—just as we realize after a certain number of years of teaching and intermittent writing, that we ourselves write at best a pedestrian prose and that we are not going to belong among the great prose stylists of our time.

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WYOMING

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